

# Austin Employee Donates Vital Organ to Sister



by Ms. Ashley Wuytens, Staff Writer, DCMA West Headquarters

**W**hen Mr. Henry McElreath, a software engineer for DCMA Austin, found out that he would be a perfect match to donate a kidney to his only sister, Valerie, he immediately decided to go ahead and do it. But he learned there is more to donating a kidney than having the surgery.



Before the donation could take place both he and his sister had to go through various tests to ensure compatibility. It took about six months to find out for sure whether they would be a perfect match. A battery of tests is critical to determine whether the recipient's body will be able to receive an organ without rejecting it.

**"It's a wonderful feeling to know that you're helping someone to maintain a normal lifestyle."**

The surgery was scheduled for Aug. 17, 2004, at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Maryland. Mr. McElreath's surgery lasted five hours, while his sister's lasted six and a half hours. After surgery, Mr. McElreath experienced some pain in his stomach area when sitting up, which was caused by the internal organs resettling into the empty cavity left by the removed kidney. Mr. McElreath remained in the hospital for five days and Ms. McElreath for nine.

Mr. McElreath returned to work Sept. 28. The doctors told him to take it easy for at least six weeks after the surgery and then listen to what his body told him to do. Ms. McElreath returned home to Georgia and went back to work on Oct. 1.

Mr. McElreath's sacrifice changed his sister's life. Prior to her surgery, she had been receiving dialysis for years. When her name came up on the list to receive a kidney, Mr. McElreath thought that he should see if their kidneys would be compatible. According to the United Network for Organ Sharing, more than 85,000 people are currently on the waiting list to receive an organ and more than 6,000 people die each year while waiting.

"I strongly recommend being a donor," said Mr. McElreath. "As long as you are healthy and lead a normal lifestyle there is no reason why you cannot be one. There are no long-term drawbacks, and it's a wonderful feeling to know that you're helping someone to maintain a normal lifestyle. I encourage anyone to explore the possibility of becoming a donor."

*A federal employee may use up to 30 days of paid leave each calendar year to serve as an organ donor. An employee may use up to seven days of paid leave each calendar year to serve as a bone-marrow donor. Leave for organ and bone marrow donation is a separate category of leave that is in addition to annual and sick leave. (Ref. 5 U.S.C. 6327)*

*For more information about organ donation and becoming a donor, visit the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' "Donate Life" Web site at <http://www.organdonor.gov>.*